

NFAC GEMS Subcommittee: Guide to Starting a Food Donation Program for VA NFS

Legislation:

1. Federal Food Donation Act of 2008

<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s110-2420>

“The purpose of this Act is to encourage executive agencies and contractors of executive agencies, to the maximum extent practicable and safe, to donate excess, apparently wholesome food to feed food-insecure people in the United States.”

2. The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act of 1996

<http://www.usda.gov/news/pubs/gleaning/appc.htm>

“ (a) IN GENERAL.—It is the sense of Congress that each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the territories and possessions of the United States should

- (1) encourage the donation of apparently wholesome food or grocery products to nonprofit organizations for distribution to needy individuals; and
- (2) consider the model Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (provided in section 402) as a means of encouraging the donation of food and grocery products.”

Food Waste Talking Points: Food waste in institutions occurs because food production forecasting is variable and subject to many factors, and cafeterias should have all selections available for the last veteran coming through the line.

Deciding to Start a Food Donation Program

Conduct a baseline assessment to determine:

- If there is management and staff support for a program.
- Determine if union partners need to be notified.
- The amount and types of food waste to discuss with potential recipient agencies
- The interest and locale of potential non-profit recipient agencies

Selecting a Non-profit Agency

- Does the agency serve veterans? If more than one agency qualifies, consider first those that serve veterans.
- Does agency staff have knowledge of food handling and/or serve safe certification? Do they have a way to maintain the food at acceptable temperature?
- Is the agency available to pick up food on a routine and consistent basis?
- Determine minimum and maximum amounts of food to be donated.

How to Save Food

- Have a written agreement with the recipient agency that you are handing off food that has been handled properly per HACCP guidelines and expect that they will do the same, see attached example.
- Hold hot or cool / freeze the food properly
- Placed in food safe containers and properly labeled with date of pick up.
- Develop a plan for saving food when there are delays in pick up and alternative methods of storage.

Food Pick Up

- Identify notification method for pick up needs, determine logistics details, type of containers to use,
- Document the temperature of the food and obtain initials from your staff and the agency at the time of hand off.
- Suggest frozen food to be picked up at least weekly
- Refrigerated food picked up at least 2x/week depending on expiration dates.

- Frequency can be adjusted

Points to Ponder

- Consider a pilot to start with, critique and improve in time.
- What is the procedure if there is a holiday, a long weekend, inclement weather, etc.
- Who will track the pound of food donated?
- Dietetic interns may be of assistance in starting a food donation program.

If in doubt, check with your regional council.

Case Examples

Case Example: The South Texas Veterans Health Care System-San Antonio started a food donation program in October 2010. We chose to donate to the Second Servings Program through the San Antonio Food Bank (SAFB). This program allows ready-prepared meals to be used at local shelters. Similar programs around the country can be found on-line under "Second Harvest". We chose this program as it served so many different shelters in the area, they had an established program already, and they serve many of the local homeless veterans. The SAFB was already picking up other items from local hotels, resorts, and restaurants in the area and their drivers are Serv Safe certified. I spoke with the program coordinator who did a site visit and discussed logistics. They provide the aluminum disposable pans and lids, dropping off a fresh supply each pick-up day. We operate on a cook-chill system and run a cold trayline which has temperature monitoring so the foods never reach the danger zone. After reviewing with the cooks at the end of each trayline, the FSW pan up any left-over items. Our cooks also go through their food bank for any items that are reaching the end of lifespan to be donated. All of these pans to go to the program are stored in the back of our retherm room on a large rack marked with signs. The pans are labeled with the name of the item, VA, and the date for pick-up and service. We combine like items in the same pan (ie-roast beef on one end of the pan, beef patties on the other end) to make good use of the disposable pans. The SAFB has not worked out a way to reuse these pans, but are working on a solution.

On Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays, the SAFB driver comes in and picks up all items to take to the shelters that day in a refrigerated truck. If pick-up falls on a holiday or when the drivers will not be picking up for some other reasons, foods are kept in the freezer and taken out the morning of the next pick-up. The shelters all have ovens to heat up hot foods and refrigerators to store cold foods. The feedback from the shelters has been very good. The participants enjoy the variety and that they receive healthy meals that are lower in salt, fat, sugar and higher in fiber.

Each month the coordinator sends us a report of the amount of food donated in pounds. This information is then passed on to our system GEMS coordinator. We also use the info to determine how to avoid overproduction in the future, although this has been difficult given our non-select menu and cook-chill system used currently. We plan to go to a modified-select menu and some hot buffets and are hoping this will also help reduce overproduction. Our facility directors are very supportive of the program as it helps us to be good stewards of our community. We also ran a canned food drive in December 2010 that was very successful and further allows all system staff to participate in helping others; it is expected that this will be done 1-2 times per year from now on.

Case Example: Martinsburg VAMC started a food donation program in November 2009. We chose our on-site Veterans Transitional Housing (VTH) non-profit agency because it was close in proximity, served veterans, had a staff person with a food handler's card, and were interested in a pilot. We made it clear to both our staff and the VTH that we would not over produce, and that donations would come from cafeteria food left at the end of the evening meal service. There are 30-40 veterans in the VTH and we agreed that we would donate up to 40 servings of any food item that is left. Our food is cook-chill. We retherm it for the cafeteria and food that is left is held at temperature until the VTH picks it up. The VTH staff have agreed to make sure the donated food is consumed that evening and that they discard the uneaten food and that it is not to be kept for a later meal. We label and date the food to expire once it is ≤ 135 degrees. We donate at the end of the evening meal, if we don't have anything to donate we call them by 5:30pm so they won't drive over. We give them the food in our pans and they return them each day when they pick up the next batch. It is working out very well, our staff morale is improved, we have reduced our solid food waste and it helps the vets to save money for a future housing.

Resources

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The Environmental Protection Agency

EPA encourages institutional foodservice to donate edible food to the hungry.

<http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserve/materials/organics/food/fd-res.htm>

EPA's [Putting Surplus Food to Good Use: A How-To Guide for Food Service Providers \(PDF\)](#) (2 pp, 1.1MB) helps food service providers start a food waste reduction and recovery program at their facilities.

EPA's [Waste Not/Want Not: Feeding the Hungry and Reducing Solid Waste Through Food Recovery \(PDF\)](#) (59 pp, 1.4MB), developed in conjunction with the US Department of Agriculture, details what businesses and individuals can do to ensure good food doesn't go to waste.

EPA's Waste Reduction Record-Setters [Don't Throw Away That Food: Strategies for Record-Setting Waste Reduction](#) provides case studies from several communities for recovery of food discards.

EPA's [Donating Surplus Food to the Needy \(PDF\)](#) (4 pp, 121K) addresses the donation of surplus food as part of a waste reduction program. Discusses traditional food banks; prepared and perishable food programs; food program services; donor responsibilities; and common concerns.

Food to Donate <http://www.foodtodonate.com/>

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